

Grandparents and Grandchildren



Learning with Grandparents



Dr Salman Al-Azami and Ian Gyllenspetz



Grandparents Plus: for children and extended families

This booklet was developed by Grandparents Plus for the Basic Skills Agency

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1-19 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1NU

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Illustrations: Ian Gyllenspetz

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Learning with grandparents in schools

This booklet describes how to benefit from grandparents' experience, expertise and commitment to their grandchildren by getting them involved in your school or children's centre.

Grandparents make a huge contribution to the lives of their grandchildren, and to their learning and development. More than one-third of the approximately 14 million grandparents in the UK spend the equivalent of three days a week caring for their grandchildren, whether babysitting, providing regular childcare, playing with their grandchildren, or learning with them. Grandparents can be seen at the school gate, in museums, on day trips, shopping, in parks, and playing football with their grandchildren.

Many grandparents enjoy coming to their grandchildren's school. As one grandfather in south London says, 'When I go to my granddaughter's school, it makes me feel young again, because children view me as a person; when outside school I am seen as an old man.' Although the average age of first-time grandparents in the UK is 49 and many are still active in the workplace, it is often retired or non-working grandparents who are seen at the school gates.

We already know that the relationship between parents and school is a very important part of a child's development. However, many grandparents also play a key role in a child's life outside school. So how do schools develop a relationship with their pupils' grandparents?

A recent survey by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) found an information gap between schools and grandparents. Schools don't generally communicate directly with grandparents to inform them of events at school or how the school is run. The survey report says:

It is interesting that many of the grandparents in our survey, where the school encourages the sharing of information, felt they knew a reasonable amount about what was happening in school, mainly as a result of good information from the parents and the children and from what was in the local press. When they had contact with the school or through newsletters they felt even more confident about what they were doing.

The BSA survey also showed that the confidence of grandparents grows when schools actively encourage their involvement and inform them about events and the work of the school; this also benefits children. The practice observed by the BSA included a grandparents' day, training sessions, involvement on visits and helping in school. (See the list of BSA materials on page 12.)

Grandparents need to know how schools have changed since they were children. This booklet aims to help schools and children's centres establish relationships and an understanding with grandparents that will benefit the institutions and the grandparents and grandchildren. We propose a range of practical suggestions for activities, from simple communication with grandparents informing them about the school, to building support groups or workshops and activities for grandparents.

Who will benefit?

1. Children

- There is an emotional bond between children and their grandparents. Seeing their grandparents actively and positively engaged with the school or children's centre may encourage children to feel more attached to the school or centre themselves.
- A strong home-school policy that embraces grandparents is even more likely to help children achieve well.

2. Schools and children's centres

- Links with grandparents can contribute to a successful school or children's centre.
- Involving grandparents could help schools achieve their extended school's core offer. In particular, it could widen community involvement.
- Learning with grandparents complements learning in school and with parents.
- All schools that have involved grandparents have reported improved standards in English and mathematics.
- Effective home-school links will contribute to a positive Ofsted inspection.

3. Grandparents

- Grandparents will feel reassured that their contribution is being recognised and valued.
- They will feel more involved with the school and may be keen to participate in and contribute to different school events.
- Grandparents will learn about today's schools and education, which may help them support their grandchildren more effectively.
- Grandparents may go on to attend IT courses, or into further learning or education.
- They may become volunteers within the school or elsewhere in the community.

4. Parents

- Grandparents' involvement with schools could help ease the pressure on parents.
- As grandparents find out more about what happens at school, parents and grandparents can form an even more effective partnership to support children's learning.

5. Wider community

- Involving grandparents can help schools build relationships with the wider community.
- Some grandparents who do not have children in the school may also like to get involved.
- Children whose grandparents can't take part in school activities could bring an uncle, aunt, family friend or neighbour to school.

What to do

It's best to plan before you start, so you can make the best use of everyone's time and resources. It is important to inform parents that you want to develop contacts with grandparents. You are probably aware of any particular family sensitivities, so seek consent where appropriate.

1. Find out about the grandparents of the children in your school

It might be easier to make plans, and more efficient, if you have as much information as possible about what grandparents have to offer and how much time they have.

- In the **school playground and at the school gates** before and after school, observe how many grandparents are collecting grandchildren.
- **Talk to them.** Might they be interested in learning more about the school and what their grandchildren are learning?
- Ask them if they would be interested in a special **grandparents' meeting**.
 - If possible, find out which children:
 - are regularly looked after by their grandparents
 - are brought to school and collected by their grandparents
 - have grandparents living in the same area and have regular contact
 - have grandparents living in another area or country.

'We developed a profile of our grandparent population by approaching parents in the first instance.'

'We have been amazed at the response to our letter – over 50 grandparents wishing to be involved! We are initially going to run four grandparents' groups this year.'





'What do you think?'

'Shall we give it a whirl?'

'I think involving grandparents is a great idea; they often have such a positive influence on a child's cognitive development, as well as [on] the wider family unit. I can't think why we haven't tapped this incredible group before.'

'We regularly arrange end-of-term cake sales in the playground, which children and grandparents do together.'

'In our school, grandparents who are retired teachers come in to support children in reading and maths.'

'I wish my school days had been so much fun!
– a grandfather

2. Encourage grandparents to support their grandchildren's learning

Grandparents are already doing a lot to help their grandchildren learn (see the BSA good practice cards, *Doing Things Together*, and the DVD, *Grandparents and Grandchildren Learning Together*). It may also be helpful for schools to find ways of helping grandparents understand the curriculum or current teaching methods. Grandparents can be involved in regular curricular activities, either through small group work or working with children one-to-one, especially those with learning difficulties. This will strengthen intergenerational relationships and show both generations that school is a place to have fun together.

- **Use the BSA good practice cards and DVD.** These were developed with grandparents, based on what they were already doing, and can be used as a discussion starter for grandparents and staff.
- Ask a couple of classroom staff to read the cards and brief others about them. You might want to consider an **in-service training session** for staff on the importance of working with grandparents.
- Use the cards and DVD in **family learning sessions** or other informal settings at school.
- Invite grandparents to **visit school assemblies**. Sometimes they can be asked to visit their grandchildren's class.
- Offer grandparents the opportunity to attend **workshops** to inform them about the national curriculum.
- Distribute literature that contains information about **changes in the education system**, for example, *A Jargon-busting ABC of Primary Schools*. (See the list of BSA materials on page 12.)
- Involve grandparents as volunteers in activities such as **reading, cooking, gardening, art and sports**.
- Encourage grandparents to help their grandchildren with **literacy, language and numeracy** through what they are doing at home.
- Grandparents with another language can support their grandchildren in their home language, which is also beneficial to the children's learning. Grandparents who speak another language might be interested in **ESOL classes** and the school could consider running one.
- Arrange collective activities such as **art, English, mathematics, science, ICT**, etc., where children work together with grandparents at school. The BSA case study of Isambard Brunel Junior School in Portsmouth is a good example. (See item iv on the list of BSA materials on page 12.)
- **Assign special tasks** for children to work on with their grandparents at home.
- Encourage grandparents to **volunteer at school** to gain a sense of how things are done in school these days.
- If you have **family learning sessions**, involve grandparents in them or run a special one for them. Sometimes you may have sessions where parents and grandparents participate together.

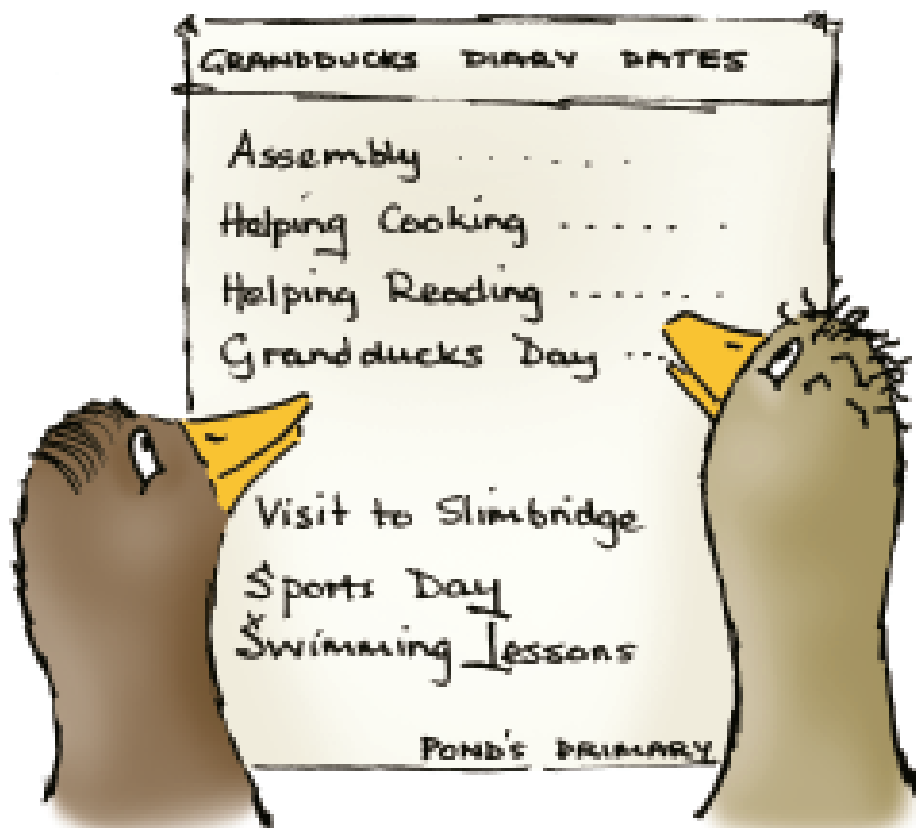
'We have a grandparents' assembly and day in March.'

'Our grandparents have an astonishing range of skills and experience. Some work as volunteers in school classes, supporting teachers and pupils. Others help with school events, building a stage for a drama production, running stalls at the summer fair or making bookshelves.'

'I love coming to my grandchildren's assemblies – I learn so much!' – a grandmother

3. Involve grandparents in general school activities

- Find out what **grandparents' interests** are, such as playing a musical instrument, computers, marathon running, football, cooking, reading, gardening or making things. Invite them to join in with particular activities or share their interests and expertise with children.
- A **grandparents' storytelling day** could focus on what life was like when they were growing up. Children can also **interview grandparents** about their own childhood.
- Hold a grandparents and grandchildren **quiz**.
- An annual grandparents' day could be a special event to which the **grandparents of all children are invited**, irrespective of where they live.
- Children could **interview grandparents for the school newsletter**.
- Children could make a **family tree**, with help from their grandparents.
- Many grandparents are busy or live some distance from the school, so give them plenty of **notice of meetings and events**.
- Invite grandparents to come to the **school open day**, or sporting events, or to help out with different activities.
- Involve grandparents in **school sports activities**, such as coaching or refereeing.
- Organise a **grandparents' race** at the school sports day.
- Invite grandparents to have their own stall at the school **fair**.
- Ask grandparents if they would be willing to help in **after-school programmes**.
- Involve grandparents in **local history** projects: going on visits with classes; taking children to visit **local museums**; arranging events where grandparents can talk about life **in the local area** when they were young.
- If you have space, open a **gardening club** and involve grandparents.



'I had a wonderful conversation with a grandmother who was evacuated during World War II and is now writing her story. It would be great to share this with children in their history project.'

'With parents' support, we hope to involve grandparents who aren't living nearby by encouraging pupils to send them postcards and letters.'



4. Set up networks

- Identify the most enthusiastic and resourceful grandparents and encourage them to set up a **grandparents' group**.
- This group can help **reach out** to other grandparents and encourage them to get involved.
- Encourage your **PTA/Friends of the School** to involve grandparents.
- Offer grandparents an opportunity to meet up at an informal **coffee morning**.
- Sketch out a yearly **plan** of your grandparents' activities and events.
- Consider whether any of the grandparents would be interested in becoming a **school governor**.
- Make sure there is sufficient and ongoing support and commitment in the school to **maintain contacts and links** between staff and grandparents.

5. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren

These grandparents should already be receiving all the information that is sent to parents.

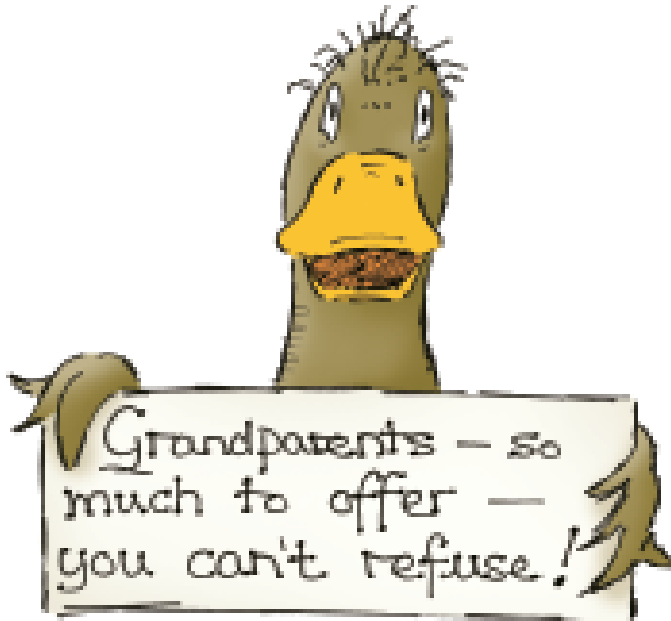
- **Have helpful information on looking after children** on hand for those grandparents acting as parents. This will help a lot of grandparents finding it difficult to cope with parenting the second time around.
- Find out about **national and local support** for grandparents raising grandchildren, such as support groups or the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network.
- Check that these grandparents are **aware of any local services** available to help their grandchildren academically or emotionally.

6. Grandparents who do not live near their grandchildren

Many grandparents play an important role in their grandchildren's learning and development, even though they don't live close by. Children can be encouraged to keep in contact with those grandparents.

- Encourage and support children to use their **home language** to write to their grandparents.
- Suggest that children **write a letter** to their grandparents telling them what they are learning in school.
- Help children **write poems** or **paint pictures** to send to their grandparents.
- Children whose grandparents have internet access could send an **email** or even use a **webcam** when talking to them via the internet or telephone.
- Encourage children to **send cards** to grandparents. Use the BSA *Postcard Pack* to do this. (See the list of BSA materials on page 12.)

Where to find out more



1. The Basic Skills Agency (www.basic-skills.co.uk)

- The BSA is committed to finding, developing and disseminating good practice in language, literacy and numeracy.
- It works as part of a wide and complex network of providers and users in England and Wales.
- It is recognised by its key stakeholders as a credible and independent centre of expertise and thinking.
- It has parallel projects on learning with grandparents that can be considered the first such attempts to acknowledge grandparents' contribution to children's learning. The following is a list of materials produced by the Basic Skills Agency on 'Learning with Grandparents':
 - i) *The silver lining of my life – Learning with Grandparents: A report of the work of the National Development Project 2005–2006 funded by the Basic Skills Agency* (by Dr Salman Al-Azami)
 - ii) *Doing Things Together* (activity cards developed through the National Development Project for grandparents to carry out learning activities with grandchildren)
 - iii) *Grandparents and Grandchildren Learning Together* (a DVD to support the good practice cards)
 - iv) *Learning with Grandparents: Grandparents and schools working together to support basic skills development* (by Ian Gyllenspetz)
 - v) *Learning with Grandparents: Literacy performance and practice across generations* (by S. Parsons and J. Bynner)
 - vi) *A Jargon-busting ABC of Primary Schools* (by Ian Gyllenspetz)
 - vii) *It Doesn't Take Much to Stay in Touch and Postcard Pack* (by Ian Gyllenspetz). For grandparents and grandchildren to stay in touch when they are apart

2. Grandparents Plus (www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)

Grandparents Plus is a charity for children and extended families.

It promotes the vital role of the extended family and grandparents in children's lives, especially vulnerable children. It does this through partnerships, evidence-based projects, training practitioners and through networks, newsletters and consultation to give grandparents and their grandchildren a voice.

Grandparents Plus worked with schools and grandparents for the BSA to develop the *Doing Things Together* good practice cards, the *Grandparents and Grandchildren Learning Together* DVD and this booklet, *Learning with Grandparents*.

3. The Grandparents' Association (www.grandparents-association.org.uk)

The Grandparents' Association works to improve the lives of children by working with and for all grandparents, especially those who:

- have lost or are losing contact with their grandchildren because of divorce, a family feud or other problems
- are caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis
- have childcare responsibilities for their grandchildren
- are interested in the educational and welfare needs of their grandchildren.

4. Magic Me (www.magicme.co.uk)

- Magic Me has 18 years' experience of running intergenerational arts projects, which link older people (55+) with young people aged 9 to 25 years in the East End of London.
- It shares expertise with individuals and organisations across the UK and beyond through publications, training and consultancy work.
- It has a programme that serves around 350 local people from diverse generations, cultures and ethnicities.
- It has received national recognition, and demand for its expertise is growing.
- It successfully brings older people and children together with a range of intergenerational activities to build a society of mutual trust and understanding.

